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National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to paragraph 16 of General Assembly resolution 52/128 of 12 December 1997, entitled "National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights", in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution.

2. In resolution 52/128, the General Assembly welcomed the growing interest shown by Member States of different regions in the establishment and strengthening of effective, independent and pluralistic national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights, as encouraged by the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions adopted by the Assembly in its resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993.

3. The General Assembly urged the Secretary-General to continue to give high priority to requests from Member States for assistance in the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions as part of the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights, and encouraged the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to further extend activities in support of national human rights institutions, including the holding of regional meetings of national institutions and international meetings of the Coordinating Committee created by national institutions, to promote the exchange of information and experience concerning the establishment and effective operation of such institutions.

4. The present report contains information on the various activities undertaken by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to establish and strengthen national institutions and on the measures taken by Governments and national human rights institutions themselves in these areas, as well as the work of the treaty monitoring bodies and the special mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights to undertake further consultations with established national human rights institutions.

5. The report covers activities for the period from 15 October 1997, the date of the report on national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly,[1] to 15 August 1999. This report complements the annual reports presented

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to the Commission on Human Rights during this period pursuant to Commission resolutions 1997/34 of 11 April 1997[2] and 1998/55 of 17 April 1998.[3] More information on assistance to national human rights institutions can be found in the reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights, on activities of the Voluntary Fund for Technical Assistance in the Field of Human Rights and on the activities of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

II. The work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and consultations between national human rights institutions and the treaty monitoring bodies and protection mechanisms established by the Commission on Human Rights

6. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights attaches great importance to the role that national institutions play in translating international human rights norms into laws, policies and practices that ensure respect for human rights at the local level. The establishment and strengthening of national institutions is one of the key strategic aims of OHCHR and a major component of its programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights. During missions to countries where national human rights institutions have been established, the High Commissioner has had consultations with their members and senior staff.

7. The activities of the Office of the High Commissioner in support of national institutions are provided with the support of the Special Adviser on National Institutions and cover the provision of practical advice and assistance to those involved in the establishment of new national institutions. This includes advice to Governments on suitable models, from a comparative perspective, for establishing an appropriate constitutional or legislative framework for any new national institution and on the nature, functions, powers and responsibilities of such institutions. It also includes support to new and/or established national human rights institutions for developing handling systems and databases for complaints, design of effective management structures, implementation of human rights education and training programmes, provision of human rights information and documentation and facilitation of international and regional meetings of national institutions to encourage the sharing of experience and development of best practices.

8. The work of the Office of the High Commissioner in the area of national institutions is guided by the Paris Principles, adopted by the Commission on Human Rights in 1992, but the High Commissioner has also agreed to programmes designed to strengthen and support a number of institutions, already in existence, which do not fully comply with these principles, but are willing to strengthen their independence and enhance their effectiveness in order to do so.

A. Advice for the establishment of national institutions.

9. During the last two years the Office of the High Commissioner provided information, advice or assistance, at their request, to the following Governments or entities in the process of establishing national human rights institutions or contemplating the establishment of such institutions: Armenia, Bangladesh, Burundi, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Germany, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nepal, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and, most recently, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

10. The Office has also provided information, advice or material support to a number of recently established national human rights institutions, including: the Public Defender of Georgia, the Latvian Human Rights Office, the Human Rights Commission of Indonesia, the Human Rights Commission of Malawi, the Moldovan Human Rights Centre, the Nigerian Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Commission of Rwanda, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Ugandan Human Rights Commission and the Zambian Human Rights Commission.

11. During the reporting period, the Special Adviser conducted several missions, including missions to represent the High Commissioner at high-level meetings, seminars and workshops, to provide advice or assistance to Governments, to conduct consultations with government officials, parliamentarians, established national institutions, non-governmental organizations and representatives from the academic sector, to lead technical cooperation needs assessments and project formulation missions, to attend steering committee meetings of technical cooperation

projects, to lead joint consultation missions with regional organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other United Nations agencies and programmes, to countries in the process of establishing national human rights institutions and to provide training to staff of national human rights institutions and to senior staff of other United Nations agencies and programmes. These included missions to Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

12. In addition, the Office of the High Commissioner responded to numerous requests from Governments and non-governmental organizations seeking general information concerning national human rights institutions. Existing national human rights institutions are included in the mailing list of the Office of the High Commissioner and receive periodic information on human rights meetings and the activities of the Office, updated lists of United Nations publications and publications of the Office of the High Commissioner produced as part of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

B. Technical assistance for the establishment and strengthening of national institutions, including through the field presence and the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

13. Technical assistance for the establishment and strengthening of national institutions is financed through extrabudgetary resources contributed to the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights. In countries where the Office has a field presence, advice and assistance is provided through the field offices.

14. To further strengthen the overall technical cooperation programme on national human rights institutions, the Office of the High Commissioner is currently expanding its roster of consultants and experts/practitioners on national human rights institutions, compiling legislation of national human rights institutions established in accordance with the Paris Principles, establishing a database on best practices of national human rights institutions' work on thematic issues, including on investigatory techniques, the protection and promotion of children's and women's rights, human rights policy design and implementation, national human rights plans of action, human rights education and training programmes. The Office is also preparing a training manual for national human rights institutions on economic, social and cultural rights.

15. During the reporting period, the Office was informed of several initiatives for the establishment of national institutions in the African region. In a number of cases these have received support, legal advice and assistance from the Office. Assistance to these newly established institutions to enable them to function effectively is a continuing challenge for the Office of the High Commissioner.

16. The Office of the High Commissioner currently has 11 field offices in the region (Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo and Uganda, as well as an office for the Southern African region) and several ongoing technical cooperation projects. Government requests for legal advice and/or assistance currently under consideration or in the process of formalization and which may include assistance to national institutions are: Angola, Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

17. The Office of the High Commissioner has an ongoing technical cooperation project with the Government of South Africa including the South African Human Rights Commission as a co-partner. As part of its human rights institutional strengthening project, one human rights officer is based with the South African Human Rights Commission to assist the Commission in carrying out its mandate. In particular, the human rights officer is working closely with the Commission in the reporting and monitoring of the Government's implementation of socio-economic rights and developing a national action plan for the promotion and protection of human rights. The steering committee that oversees the implementation of the project is chaired by the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission.

18. On 14 June 1999, the field office in Angola, which is part of the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA), organized, in cooperation with the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Justice and the support of some donor countries, a pilot seminar on national human rights institutions for members of the Human Rights Commission of the Angolan National Assembly, aimed at familiarizing parliamentarians with the role and functions of such institutions. The Office of the High Commissioner is currently preparing a project

for a second seminar in the Province of Benguela, in October 1999.

19. The Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Rwanda, Michel Moussalli, has been regularly consulting the Special Adviser concerning assistance to the newly established National Commission for Human Rights of Rwanda and to its recently appointed members. On 2 and 3 August 1999, a working visit to headquarters of the Office of the High Commissioner by the members of the National Commission was organized. This visit took place immediately after a four-week training course on human rights at the International Human Rights Institute in Strasbourg, France, attended by all the members of the National Commission. The visit was sponsored by the Office of the High Commissioner at the request of the members of the National Commission. At the time of preparation of the present report, the Special Representative is conducting a mission to Rwanda, during which technical assistance to the National Commission will be discussed. The assistance will include the organization of a workshop on the mandate, functions and role of national institutions, to which members of other national institutions will be invited to share practical experience.

20. The Office has recently initiated a joint technical cooperation project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Uganda. It is expected that at the end of the two-year project, the Ugandan Human Rights Commission, will be a fully self-sustaining institution, functioning in conformity with its mandate and with broad support from all sectors of society. The Commission will develop and implement, with the assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner, a detailed programme of work, including for receiving and effectively addressing complaints of human rights violations, reviewing existing and draft legislation with a view to determining conformity with international and national human rights obligations and determining the need for domestic legislation to give effect to Uganda's international treaty obligations, assisting the Government in discharging its reporting obligations under international human rights treaties to which Uganda is a party, for providing human rights education and training to the general public as well as for specialised professional groups and for the establishment of an information and documentation centre. The Office is also currently discussing, along with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, in cooperation with the Human Rights Commissions of Uganda and India.

21. OHCHR has been coordinating its efforts in Africa with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), including in the area of national institutions. The United Nations High Commissioner or one of her representatives has participated in several major meetings of OAU, including in the first African Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Mauritius in 1999. In her statement to the Mauritius meeting, the High Commissioner emphasized the importance of national human rights institutions. More information can be found in the report of the Secretary- General on cooperation between the United Nations and OAU.

Activities and programmes of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Asia-Pacific region

22. For several years, the Office of the High Commissioner has been assisting in the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions in the Asia-Pacific region. Activities have included advice on legislation and other matters relating to the creation of new institutions as well as training and technical support to existing institutions. The Office of the High Commissioner works closely with the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, which was established in 1996.

23. The Office of the High Commissioner currently has a field office in Gaza, field offices in four countries in the region (Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia and Mongolia) and several technical cooperation projects, which include assistance to established national human rights institutions and for the establishment of such institutions. Various requests currently under consideration and/or in the process of formalization include assistance for the establishment or strengthening of national institutions in Fiji, Jordan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

24. Since 1997, the field office in Gaza has developed a close and constructive relationship with the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights. The overall programme of assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner in Palestine includes three components that are complementary in reinforcing elements of law, policy and institutional structure. While local non-governmental organizations and the Independent Commission have a role to play in all of these areas, the assistance of the Office to the Independent Commission centers on the programme component dedicated to the goal of establishing a Palestinian legal framework consistent with human rights standards. To date, the Office has provided assistance to the Palestinian Independent Commission by way of direct institutional strengthening, support for its field workers programme, law reform and other technical support for training and human

rights promotion activities. The law reform programme has supported the work of the Commission to comment on priority legislation that the programme covers, by promoting a consultative approach to law reform in Palestine. The field workers programme, which has posted three field workers in the West Bank and one in Gaza, has permitted the Independent Commission to raise awareness on human rights in each region of the country and to monitor violations and collect complaints and testimonies of alleged violations at the local level. The Office of the High Commissioner has also provided two grants to the Commission to support efforts to build up its collection of human rights documentation and legal materials.

25. A technical cooperation project established by the Office of the High Commissioner with the Government of Nepal, signed in 1996, is aimed at improving the protection of human rights by strengthening the system of administration of justice, building national capacity to deal with human rights issues, including support for the establishment of a national human rights commission. Comprehensive advice on a proposed Nepalese draft law establishing a national human rights commission has been provided.

26. As part of a first programme of technical assistance to Mongolia, a seminar on national human rights institutions was held in Ulaanbaatar in April 1996, in cooperation with the Parliamentary Subcommittee for Human Rights. As a follow-up to this seminar and within the framework of a second programme of the Office of the High Commissioner in 1997, a parliamentary task force to elaborate a draft law to create a national human rights commission was established and the draft was discussed during a national conference organized by the task force with the support of the field office of the Office of the High Commissioner in Mongolia. In order to allow for government representatives to obtain first-hand information on the work of human rights commissions in the Asia-Pacific region, the Office has facilitated the participation of government representatives in meetings of the Asia-Pacific Forum. The field office in Mongolia, as well as the Special Adviser, have continued discussions about the draft law on the national commission with members of the Parliament.

27. The field office of the Office of the High Commissioner in Indonesia is implementing a technical cooperation project aimed at providing assistance for the implementation of the national plan of action on human rights (1998-2003) in four main areas: (a) national capacity-strengthening in human rights reporting; (b) national educational programme; (c) raising human rights awareness through the dissemination of human rights information; and (d) strengthening of the Indonesian national Commission on Human Rights.

28. Several regional initiatives to support established national institutions have been implemented by the Office of the High Commissioner. These initiatives included a training programme on economic, social and cultural rights for representatives of national institutions in cooperation with the Human Rights Commission of the Philippines and the Canadian Human Rights Foundation; a project to develop a training programme on investigatory techniques for representatives of established institutions; and a workshop for national institutions and non-governmental organizations organized in cooperation with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

Activities and programmes of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Europe, Central Asia and North America

29. The Office currently has five field offices in the region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Georgia) and several technical cooperation projects, including assistance to established national institutions in Georgia, Latvia and the Republic of Moldova. Requests for assistance currently under consideration and/or in the process of formalization, which may include assistance to national human rights institutions, include: Armenia, Belarus, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Ukraine.

30. The Office of the High Commissioner has put considerable effort into a project with UNDP to support a national human rights institution in Latvia. This project is currently being evaluated. Although the institutional base and focus of the project has been the Latvian National Human Rights Office, capacity development activities have also been directed at strengthening the linkages between the Office and others involved in the promotion and protection of human rights in Latvia, including Parliament, government agencies and civil society.

31. The Moldovan Human Rights Centre was established by law at the end of 1997 as an independent national institution to protect and promote human rights. A joint project with UNDP is currently facilitating assistance to the institution and a number of training sessions and advice to process complaints has been provided.

32. The Office is providing advice to the Public Defender's Office of Georgia, as part of a UNDP three-year

project, entitled "Capacity-building of the public defender's office in Georgia", which aims at assisting this institution to operate as a functional, independent national institution with a mandate for the protection and promotion of human rights. The contribution of the Office of the High Commissioner is to provide expert advice at regular project steering committee meetings and to support the participation of United Nations and international experts in meetings where policy considerations and priorities for the development of the Public Defender's Office are determined.

Activities and programmes of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean

33. The Office of the High Commissioner currently has three field offices in the region (Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala) and several technical cooperation projects that include assistance to established national human rights institutions, such as those in Guatemala and Bolivia. Government requests for assistance currently under consideration or in the process of formalization and which may include assistance to the national human rights institutions include requests from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru, as well as a request for a regional initiative for the Andean region.

34. Since its establishment in 1997, the field office in Colombia has been working closely with the Office of the People's Advocate of Colombia. During the reporting period, several joint visits to the field to investigate alleged human rights violations or monitor the plight of displaced persons were conducted. The Office of the High Commissioner has also been actively participating in a working group coordinated by the Office of the People's Advocate to investigate and prevent massacres, as well as to alert the public security authorities. During her visit to Colombia, in October 1998, the High Commissioner had high-level consultations with senior Colombian authorities, including with the People's Advocate, and in her annual report to the Commission on Human Rights in 1998, she urged the Government "to redouble its efforts to support publicly, with adequate resources and concrete action", the various national institutions, including the Office of the People's Advocate.[4] On 6 August 1999, the field office in Colombia signed an agreement of cooperation with the Office of the People's Advocate to assist the institution in the design of a system for the handling of complaints and an early-warning system for the prevention of massacres and displacements, as well as in carrying out a study on the public defence and assisting the institution in the elaboration of a human rights promotion programme.

35. The technical cooperation office of the Office of the High Commissioner in El Salvador has had several meetings with the Office of the Human Rights Counsel of El Salvador to discuss its possible inclusion as a beneficiary of the comprehensive technical assistance project currently under implementation. Staff of the Office of the Human Rights Counsel have participated in three training courses on reporting obligations to the treaty monitoring bodies and the Office of the Counsel is currently participating in an ad hoc committee for the elaboration of a national plan of action on human rights education, established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education with the joint support of the Office of the High Commissioner, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Copies of all human rights publications produced by the Office of the High Commissioner in El Salvador have been provided to the documentation centre of the Office of the Human Rights Counsel.

36. As part of the work of the field office in Guatemala, training has been provided to staff of the Office of the Counsel for Human Rights for the establishment of an Office of the Deputy Counsel for Human Rights for the rights of the indigenous populations. An expert was hired by the Office of the High Commissioner to provide and to facilitate consultations between the Office of the Counsel and the indigenous populations groups. The field office in Guatemala maintains a close relationship with the Office of the Counsel for Human Rights for the coordination of all technical cooperation activities as well as for the coordination of consultations with different thematic mandates, including with the special rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights conducting fact-finding visits to the country (the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers). The work of the Office of the High Commissioner in Guatemala in this area has been jointly implemented and coordinated with both UNDP and the United Nations Human Rights Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA).

37. In October 1998, the High Commissioner for Human Rights signed a memorandum of understanding with the Andean Commission of Jurists to facilitate assistance to Member States of the subregion, including in the area of national human rights institutions. A regional technical cooperation programme to implement this agreement is currently being discussed. During 1998, the Office of the High Commissioner also discussed with the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, based in San Jose, Costa Rica, an agreement of cooperation that includes assistance to

national institutions that comply or are committed to comply with the Paris Principles.

C. Assistance provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to international and regional meetings of national institutions

38. The second Regional Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions was held in Durban, South Africa, from 30 June to 3 July 1998. The conference, convened by the Office of the High Commissioner and the Coordinating Committee of African National Institutions, was attended by the High Commissioner and was hosted by the South African Human Rights Commission. The Declaration adopted in Durban by the Conference national institutions recognized the importance of creating and developing national human rights institutions in African countries, in conformity with the Paris Principles in order to ensure their credibility, integrity, independence and effectiveness.

39. National human rights institutions in the Asia Pacific region have been meeting, with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner, on an annual basis. The first regional workshop of Asia Pacific national institutions was held in Darwin, Australia, in 1996. The forum held its second workshop in New Delhi in 1997 and its third in Jakarta in 1998. The fourth Asia Pacific workshop of national institutions will convene in Manila, in September 1999.

40. The Office of the High Commissioner has sent representatives to the last two meetings of the Ibero-American Federation of Organizations, which groups national institutions from the region. The meetings attended were the second congress of the Federation, held in Toledo, Spain, in 1997, and the third congress held in Lima from 6 to 9 September 1998.

D. Consultations with national human rights institutions by treaty monitoring bodies and protection mechanisms established by the Commission on Human Rights

41. During the examination of States parties reports, treaty monitoring bodies systematically request States parties to submit detailed information on whether they have established an independent institution with a specific mandate to protect and promote human rights at the national level.

42. Consultations with established national human rights institutions is normal practice for almost all established working groups, special rapporteurs and independent experts of the Commission on Human Rights. This includes the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and thematic and country rapporteurs and independent experts, who, during their missions to countries where such institutions have been established, conduct consultations with them. More information on these consultations can be found in their annual reports to the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly.

43. At its 51st plenary meeting, on 1 December 1998, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted General Comment no. 10, recognizing the important role of national human rights institutions in the protection of economic, social and cultural rights at the national level and emphasizing the importance of ensuring that the mandates of national human rights institutions include appropriate attention to economic, social and cultural rights. States parties are requested to include information on both the mandates and the main activities of such institutions in their reports to the Committee.

44. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has systematically requested States parties to submit detailed information on whether they have established an independent mechanism to monitor the rights of the child at the national level. If States parties do not have such a mechanism, the Committee has recommended this as a priority. In situations where States parties have already established national human rights institutions, the Committee has sought information about the mandate, resources and functioning of such institutions to enable it to assess whether the rights of children are being adequately addressed.

E. Activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights within the framework of the United Nations Decade on Human Rights Education and Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination

45. Most established national institutions have a mandate to promote human rights education at the national level. As part of the activities of the United Nations Decade on Human

Rights Education, coordinated by the Office of the High Commissioner, in close cooperation with UNESCO, representatives of national human rights institutions have participated at the international, regional and/or national level in activities of the Decade. Several national institutions have been involved in the elaboration and implementation of national action plans on human rights education and many institutions have sent materials to the Office of the High Commissioner.

46. In accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1999/78 of 28 April 1999, on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the Office of the High Commissioner has recently addressed a letter to all Governments and national institutions to review the progress made and to reappraise the obstacles in this area.

F. Cooperation between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, other United Nations agencies and programmes and international and regional organizations

47. Many activities and programmes for the establishment or strengthening of national institutions have been conducted in close cooperation with UNDP, within the framework of the memorandum of understanding concluded in 1998. The Office of the High Commissioner is also jointly implementing with UNDP the project on Human Rights Strengthening (HURIST), which has a significant national institutions component. The Office is also involved in a joint programme with UNDP to provide training for UNDP resident representatives, including training on the role of independent national institutions in capacity-building for sustainable development. The Special Adviser has participated in both training courses conducted so far, the first in Côte d'Ivoire for UNDP resident representatives in the West and Central African region and the second in Sri Lanka for UNDP resident representatives in the Asia-Pacific region.

48. The Office of the High Commissioner has also been working closely with several other United Nations agencies and programmes, including the United Nations Volunteers, within the framework of a memorandum signed with the Office in 1995, as well as with other multilateral organizations, including the OSCE (in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Ukraine and Uzbekistan) and the Commonwealth (in countries such as Malawi).

III. Coordinating Committee of National Institutions

49. As endorsed by the Commission on Human Rights in resolution 1994/54, the international Coordinating Committee continues to hold its annual meetings in conjunction with the annual session of the Commission on Human Rights. The Coordinating Committee held its sixth and seventh sessions at the United Nations Office at Geneva on 2, 3 and 6 April 1998 and from 20 to 22 April 1999, respectively. The High Commissioner for Human Rights encouraged representatives of national institutions to continue meeting, in particular at the regional level, and reiterated that the Office of the High Commissioner would be supportive of these activities.

50. During the seventh session of the Coordinating Committee, the Credentials Committee, established during the sixth session, examined materials submitted by a number of national institutions without adopting any final decision. At the invitation of the Advisory Council for Human Rights of Morocco, the Coordinating Committee decided to hold its next biennial international meeting of national institutions in Marrakesh, in 2000. Separate reports on the sixth and seventh annual sessions of the Committee are available through the Office of the High Commissioner upon request.

IV. Participation of national human rights institutions in meetings of the Commission on Human Rights

51. The issue of participation by national institutions in meetings of the Commission on Human Rights and its subsidiary bodies was the subject of several proposals and resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights (resolutions 1997/34 and 1998/55) and the General Assembly (resolution 52/128, para. 13).

52. National human rights institutions have repeatedly expressed the wish that their work find an expression in other fora of the United Nations. At the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights, during consideration of the item of the agenda relating to national human rights institutions, the Chairman decided that national institutions addressing the Commission could do so from a special section of the floor, set aside specifically for this purpose, under the name plate "National institutions". This arrangement was maintained at the fifty-fifth session of the Commission.

V. Role of the national human rights institutions in the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the national and local levels

53. During the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, several commemoration activities were organized by national human rights institutions. One of the major initiatives was an international workshop of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights held in Paris on 3 December 1998, hosted by the national Human Rights Consultative Commission of France.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

54. The work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the area of national institutions has increased rapidly during the past two years. Member States are encouraged to continue supporting the efforts of the Office in this area and to provide additional financial resources as part of their contributions to the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights, to enable the Office to further extend its activities in support of Member States that request assistance in establishing national institutions and also to support such institutions in their work.

55. The holding of regional meetings of national institutions and international meetings of the Coordinating Committee to promote the exchange of information and experience concerning the establishment and effective operation of such institutions has proved an effective mechanism for the strengthening of those institutions at the national level and to further increase awareness of issues in the field of human rights. These meetings have been conducted with the direct support and participation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and will continue with such support.

Notes

[1] A/52/468.

[2] E/CN.4/1998/47.

[3] E/CN.4/1999/95.

[4] E/CN.4/1998/16, chap. VI, recommendation no. 18.